

National Highway System

From: Transport Canada

In response to growing recognition of the importance of highway transportation to the Canadian economy and the need for action to preserve Canada's highway infrastructure, in 1987, the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Council of Ministers Responsible for Transportation and Highway Safety concluded that the federal, provincial and territorial governments work together to identify Canada's primary highway system along with related needs and costs.

Later, in February 1988 a cooperative study was launched to address the issues raised, led by a Task Force of representatives from the federal, provincial and territorial transportation departments.

As a result, the NHS was first defined and endorsed in 1988 by the Council of Ministers and included more than 24,500 kilometres (km) of existing primary routes that support inter-provincial and international trade and travel by connecting, as directly as possible, a capital city, or major provincial population or commercial centre in Canada with:

- another major provincial population or commercial centre;

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- another major population or commercial centre in an adjacent province or territory;
- a major port of exit or entry with the United States; and
- another transportation mode directly served by the highway mode, for example, ferry terminals.

In September 2003, the Council of Deputy Ministers responsible for Transportation and Highway Safety directed a committee of officials to undertake the first-ever review of the highway system route designation and assess whether conditions have changed since 1988, to determine if some existing provincial and territorial routes could now satisfy the criteria originally used to identify the system.

On September 23, 2004, based on a federal due diligence exercise taking into account demographic, social and economic changes over the past 15 years, the Council of Ministers agreed to add approximately 2,700 km of strategic and nationally important highway routes to the existing 1988 NHS, an 11 per cent increase.

The Council of Ministers also agreed to establish a Federal\Provincial\Territorial working group named the NHS Task Force to further develop additional criteria to identify additional routes that, if agreed upon, would primarily represent highways that are important from a provincial, territorial and regional perspective.

As a special case, inter-modal connectors were also added to the scope of the review, recognizing their importance for trade and commerce. Inter-modal connectors are short stretches of roadway sections that serve as truck routes and provide safe and efficient access to and connection between the freight terminals (ports, railways, and airports) and major highways included in the NHS.

In September 2005, the Task Force recommended the Ministers approve the addition of close to 4,500 km of feeder routes and over 5,900 km of northern and remote routes to the system. The Task Force also recommended the addition of over 500 km of key intermodal connectors and close to 100 km of corrections to the 2004 NHS. These roads (feeder, northern and remote and intermodal connectors) were added because they are of importance to Canada, the provinces and the regions in terms of moving people and goods efficiently, effectively and safely and because they meet the agreed upon criteria for inclusion.

The Task Force recommendations were approved by the Council of Ministers on September 22, 2005. The National Highway System now consists of over 38,000 km of highways. This amounts to a 56 per cent increase in the network length over what was approved in 1988.

The 2005 expanded NHS encompasses three categories:

Core Routes

Key interprovincial and international corridor routes (the original 1988 NHS routes, the amended September 2004 NHS additions and links to key intermodal facilities and major border crossings that connect to these routes)

Feeder Routes

Key linkages to Core Routes from other provincial and regional population and economic centres (including links to intermodal facilities and important border crossings)

Northern and Remote Routes

Key linkages to Core and Feeder routes that provide the primary means of access to northern and remote areas, economic activities and resources.

Summary of NHS Routes (as of September 2005)

Jurisdiction	Core Routes	Feeder Routes	Northern and Remote Routes	Total
Yukon	1,079 km	-	948 km	2,027 km
Northwest Territories	576 km	-	847 km	1,423 km
Nunavut	-	-	-	-
British Columbia	5,861 km	447 km	724 km	7,032 km
Alberta	3,970 km	217 km	197 km	4,384 km
Saskatchewan	2,450 km	-	238 km	2,688 km
Manitoba	982 km	742 km	370 km	2,093 km
Ontario	6,131 km	706 km	-	6,836 km
Quebec	3,448 km	766 km	1,436 km	5,649 km
New Brunswick	993 km	832 km	-	1,825 km

Prince Edward Island	208 km	188 km	-	396 km
Nova Scotia	903 km	296 km	-	1,199 km
Newfoundland and Labrador	1,008 km	298 km	1,163 km	2,469 km
Total	27,608 km	4,490 km	5,922 km	38,021 km

- [Council of Ministers news release](#)
- [Council of Ministers NHS Review - Full Report \(September 2005\)](#)
- [NHS Map](#)



Transport Canada is closely monitoring the COVID-19 situation. In response, we have issued some **transportation-related measures and guidance**. Please check if any of these measures apply to you.

You may experience longer than usual wait times or partial service interruptions. If you cannot get through, please **contact us by email**.

For information on COVID-19 updates, please visit **Canada.ca/coronavirus**.

Date modified:

2022-08-08